# Editorial

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What is reflexivity? The word reflexive is derived from the Latin *reflexivus*, which means "capable of bending or turning back" (Harper, n.d.). So, what does bending or turning back have to do with educational research? Why, how, and when should we as educational researchers bend or turn back in our continual quest to move forward from not knowing to knowing? Here, it is helpful to consider how our knowing happens. If we understand knowledge as "always constructed relative to a framework, to a form of representation, to a cultural code, and to a personal biography" (Eisner, 1992, p. 14), then we can become more mindful of how our selves, positionings, understandings, and beliefs as researchers interact with research processes and influence the educational representations and explanations we produce. Bending or turning back to put our selves as researchers in the picture is in keeping with what Feldman, Paugh, and Mills (2004, p. 974) identified as one of the most important methodological features of self-study approaches to educational research, which is "to be self-critical of one's role as both practitioner and researcher." Here we can also make links to the work of narrative scholars, such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who argued that it is essential for researchers to be mindful that how they conceive and enact their roles will influence the research process. Clandinin and Connelly maintained that researchers must strive to be open and self-critical about their roles when conducting research and when constructing research texts. Thus, taking a reflexive stance offers a view of educational research that is experiential and contingent. It also calls attention to how uncertainty or not knowing in research processes can point to significant opportunities for discovery and growth (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014). This offers a lifelike dimension that is often lacking in accounts of educational research that map out a predetermined, linear progression to a definitive endpoint (Pithouse, 2007).

Usher (1993) argued that "reflexivity and critique, critique through reflexivity, are skills which [educational] researchers need to develop" (p. 114). The idea of reflexivity as an essential research *skill* implies that reflexivity is not only a certain stance that we take as researchers, but that it is something that we can or should *enact* through our research practice:

*reflexive action involves critically examining one's personal and theoretical dispositions and, at the same time, investigating how one's personal and theoretical commitments can transform patterns of critical educational discourse. (Waghid, 2002, p. 463)*

Questioning *how* to enact reflexivity in ways that can be transformative is a key component of educational research for social change in contemporary South Africa, as it is elsewhere if we are to take up critical issues of self and others as represented in relation to such areas as race, gender, class, sexuality, and geographic location. This special issue foregrounds the relational dimensions and complexities of research reflexivity through articles that offer critical perspectives on enacting reflexivity in educational research across academic disciplines and institutional contexts in South Africa and internationally.

The articles in this issue illustrate the significance and potential of enacting reflexivity in educational research, but they also show that research reflexivity is a multifaceted and "hard to pin down" phenomenon and practice that requires researchers to pose challenging questions to themselves:

- "How can I deepen and extend my understandings of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my writing and practice?" (Whitehead)
- "I asked myself, how did I do that, what if I did things differently?" (Naicker)
- "Which features of my teaching are particularly hard for me to watch?" (Bullock)
- "How would I answer the question that I ask of you?" (Meskin, Singh, and van der Walt)
- "Do [I] think [I'm] trying to be perfectly reflexive?" (McLay)
- "What remains (potentially) unresolved?" (Chisanga, Rawlinson, Madi, and Sotshangane)

There seem to be many possible connections to make between and amongst the articles in this special issue. These connections include the approaches themselves, drawing on arts-based work, poetic inquiry, performance, the use of the visual, and the use of technologies. The use of these various approaches suggests that reflexivity can be nurtured through innovation. The first two articles come out of collective work, demonstrating the significance of the work of research teams in engaging in reflexivity, and while the other articles are written by individual scholars, the authors demonstrate the possibilities for reflexivity in the *doing* of the research. The highlighting of these multiple ways of engaging in acts of reflexivity in educational research goes a long way towards enriching the idea of multiple ways of both knowing and showing. Critically, this concern with the significance of reflexivity runs across the social sciences and education in the posing of new questions in such areas as sociology and anthropology, as can be seen in the theme of a recent conference at Bishops University in Canada, *Where is Sociology Now?*[1]

## About the Articles

In their article, "Putting the Self in the Hot Seat: Enacting Reflexivity through Dramatic Strategies", Tamar Meskin, Lorraine Singh, and Tanya van der Walt, whose backgrounds are in drama and theatre, draw on their discipline-specific knowledge to discuss the development of what they term the *reciprocal self-interview (RSI)*, the origins of the RSI idea, and its potential value as a reflexive interrogatory method—to expand possibilities for both reflexive research in general and self-study methodologies in particular.

Next, in "Enacting Reflexivity through Poetic Inquiry", Theresa Chisanga, Wendy Rawlinson, Sibongile Madi, and Nkosinathi Sotshangane explore how reflexivity can be enacted through collective processes of

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[1] A conference organised by the Sociology Department, Bishops University, Lennoxville, Quebec, October 3–5, 2014.

creating, performing, and writing about found poetry; confidently placing the researcher at the heart of the work—a researcher who is not shy to embody and express a profound concern for personal and social change.

Shawn Bullock, in his article, "Self-Study, Improvisational Theatre, and the Reflective Turn: Using Video Data to Challenge My Pedagogy of Science Teacher Education", invites us into his physics curriculum methods classroom in a pre-service teacher education programme in Canada. Bullock brings together ideas from teacher education and theatre literature to turn back to a video recording of his own teaching with the lens of a viewer as well as researcher and teacher educator. Bullock considers the reflexive effects of both viewing video recordings of his classes and bringing ideas from the world of theatre to bear on his pedagogy of science teacher education.

Responding to a scarcity of studies that explore reflexivity in educational leadership, Sagie Naicker's article, "Digital Memory Box as a Tool for Reflexivity in Researching Leadership Practice", demonstrates his use of digital memory boxes to generate personal history data about his leadership practice. Highlighting the significance of involving participants, a dialogical partner, and critical friends in his research journey, Naicker details the reflexive and collaborative processes involved in creating the digital memory boxes and the co-constructed reflexivity that emerged from these processes.

In "iReflect: An Account of Enacting Reflexivity in Sociocultural Research into Students as iPad-Using Learners", Katherine McLay refocuses her gaze on her self as researcher in the context of an ongoing qualitative investigation into the use of iPads as a tool for secondary school student learning in Australia. She critically examines how her philosophical, methodological, and theoretical orientations influence her enactment of particular reflexive methods. McLay explains how she has come to believe that making a scholarly contribution requires her to perform reflexivity in ways that align with her particular research interests.

Finally, Jack Whitehead in his research memoir, "Enacting Educational Reflexivity in Supervising Research into Creating Living-Educational-Theories", takes the reader into the reflexivity of not only "looking back" over his own work with living theory, but also the work of other scholars, including several South African researchers who have applied a model of living theory. Appropriately, given the influence of Whitehead's work on new scholars in South Africa, the article offers what might be regarded as a "full circle" in relation to scholarship and practice related to reflexivity.

Following the six articles, we include a conference report and a book review. Omar Esau reports on the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) Annual Conference that took place in August 2014. The conference theme was *Researching Education: Future Directions*. Significantly, Esau highlights how generative discussions at the conference sessions opened up new possibilities for educational research that is aimed at social change.

Rounding out this issue of ERSC is Ashley DeMartini's review of a book by Ellen Rose, *On Reflection: An Essay on Technology, Education, and the Status of Thought in the Twenty-First Century.* As DeMartini highlights in her review, the shifting landscape of thought as a result of the use of new media and new technologies, in itself, offers new cause for reflexivity.

Taken as a whole, this issue of ERSC is meant to advance dialogue and debate in relation to reflexivity in educational research within South Africa and transnationally. We thank our wonderful contributors and the editors of ERSC for setting this dialogue in motion.

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